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ABSTRACT

This paper traces the development of word lists from 1914 through 1968. Major word lists are cited and a brief description of the research involved in developing the word lists is presented. A bibliography is also included. (WR)

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THE DEVELOPMENT OF WORD LISTS: A HISTORIC OVERVIEW

by John N. Mangieri

Since Jones' study of word lists in 1914, the listening, speaking, reading, and writing vocabularies of children and adults have been a focal point of interest to researchers. This interest has led to the development of innumerable word lists, and the studies described herein give a historical overview of some of the most noteworthy existing word lists.

Thorndike, in 1921, compiled a word list study of major educational significance. His original list was comprised of the 10,000 most commonly used words in the English language. The words were derived from the Bible, elementary school books, classics, correspondence, newspapers, and trade and occupational books.

In 1921, Tidyman also conducted a word list investigation. The vocabulary contained in children's compositions served as the basis of this survey, and Tidyman ascertained the 3,000 most frequently found words in these compositions.

In a study published in 1925, Horn conducted research with pre-school, kindergarten, and first grade children. This investigation was concerned with the speaking vocabularies of these children, and the Horn word list was the consequence of his study.

Gates, in 1926, utilized the initial 2,500 words of the Thorndike list as well as first 1,000 words of the Horn and Packer lists in his investigation. The 4,300 words were then considered by judges with diverse occupations and opinions. The judges applied five criteria to place the words

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into rank order, and a 1,500 word list resulted from this study. The judges considered these to be the words of highest utility for children, and the list was further subdivided into the first, second, and third 500 words.

A study of major importance was conducted in 1928 by the Child Study Committee of the International Kindergarten Union. The speaking vocabulary of pre-school children was surveyed, and 2,596 words were found to occur most frequently in the speech of these children. The International Kindergarten Union (IKU) word list often serves as the foundation for beginning reading programs.

Thorndike, in 1932, expanded his word list to 20,000 words, and Hester utilized this revised list in her investigation. The purpose of the Hester study was to determine the nature and extent of the vocabulary presented to sixth grade children. Hester compiled a list of 1,769 words and advocated these words as a vocabulary of new words to be taught in the sixth grade. This list excluded the first 6,000 words of the Thorndike list, the words appearing only once in the textbooks studied, and terms that writers of these textbooks did not consider to be important.

In 1939, Stone analyzed the first three readers of several popular series. The vocabulary in these books was classified and placed into eight levels of difficulty. The study resulted in the compilation of 150 words into rank order for the first and second levels of difficulty.

In a study published in 1940, Dolch compiled his Basic Sight Vocabulary word list. The Dolch list was devoid of nouns and consisted of 220 words,

which were derived from the International Kindergarten Union word list and the Gates word list. The absence of nouns can be attributed to Dolch's desire to formulate a list comprised of service words. Dolch's list is considered by many to be the most well-known of all word lists.

A word list of major significance was compiled by Rinsland in 1947. Rinsland studied the vocabulary employed by children in various informal writing situations. It was found that 25,362 different words were alphabetized, and their frequency of use in the grades one through eight was indicated.

Figurel, in 1948, conducted a study dealing with the vocabulary of disadvantaged children. The study involved students in grades two through six, and Figurel compared these students' vocabularies with that of word lists. It was reported in this investigation that disadvantaged children know less than half the words they should know.

In 1950, Kearney analyzed the vocabulary contained in forty-two pre-primers, thirty-eight primers, and forty-one first grade readers. The 121 books, published between 1930 and 1940, were examined for comparison of vocabulary control. Kearney found that 2,691 different words and 568,301 running words were used in these books. The researcher recommended that reading should be limited to certain words and that a high degree of repetition is desirable.

In a study published by Maclatchy and Wardwell in 1951, 111 books were analyzed and tabulations were made concerning the vocabulary of prepr:imers, primers, and first readers of twenty-five basic reading series commonly used

throughout the United States. A list of the 150 preprimer words, contained in more than seventy per cent of the first readers investigated, is presented under four headings--those occurring in (1) all primers and all first readers, (2) all first readers, (3) more than seventy per cent of the primers and of the first readers, and (4) more than seventy per cent of the primers.

Bryan, in 1952, investigated the adequacy of existing word lists. Children in grades two through six, and from different geographic areas, were tested, and the study revealed these students were able to identify by sight at least 10,000 words.

The vocabulary contained in the basic preprimers, primers, and first readers of seven reading series was investigated by Reeve in 1958. In these books, 683 different words were introduced, and 109 of these words were common to the seven reading series. The 115 words a child would encounter in the preprimers were identified, and the study also indicated that forty-one words were present in six of the seven series.

In a study published by Fullmer and Kolson in 1961, a beginning reading word list was tabulated. Their investigation revealed that 184 words occurred most frequently in the preprimers, primers, and the first readers of eleven basal reading series.

One phase of vocabulary research was conducted at the Falk Laboratory School from 1964 to 1968. In the Falk School Study, words were tabulated from the vocabulary children encountered in five reading series, seven content series, and fifty-one library books. One hundred and one books were

involved in the preliminary stage of investigation, and words from these books were arranged into a sight vocabulary list on which pupils in grades one through three were tested. The Falk School vocabulary study revealed that primary children are exposed to, and know by sight, as many as 11,000 words from various sources. Some children recognized as many as 4,000 to 5,000 words the first year, and over 9,000 words by the end of the third year.

In summary, word lists vary greatly with regard to their origins, importance, and vocabularies. Although word lists have been compiled for numerous purposes, they are utilized primarily for diagnosis and evaluation. In addition, word lists provide educators with an excellent body of information concerning the reading, listening, speaking, and writing vocabularies of children and adults.

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